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Quito: Not Just Another Conference

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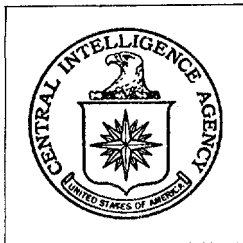
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November 4, 1974

Quito: Not Just Another Conference**Summary**

The OAS foreign ministers meeting at Quito on November 8-11 will probably run according to the plan of its sponsors and result in the end of the ten-year-old sanctions against Cuba. There is, however, a significant risk that the conference may be contentious and inconclusive. If the minority wishing to maintain the sanctions presses too hard on its case that Havana is still a subversive threat, Castro's advocates will be tempted to counter with charges of US intervention in the hemisphere. Another problem lies in confusion among the countries that normally follow the US lead on such issues. Unsure of the "correct" course, many are inclined to abstain, leaving the sponsors of the resolution up for vote increasingly uncertain that they have the two-thirds majority to win.

Eleven governments are sure affirmatives in favor of lifting the sanctions; three are certain nays. Most others are inclined to join the majority, but all are wobbling to some degree.

Comments and queries on the contents of this publication are welcome. They may be directed to
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The OAS foreign ministers meeting at Quito will be a watershed in inter-American affairs. If the conference plays out according to its authors' design, the 1964 resolutions censuring Cuba will be rescinded and the anomaly of the widely flouted sanctions against Havana will be removed. The resulting juridical freedom of OAS members to decide freely and without stigma whether or not to associate with the Castro regime will give extra force to the broadly held view that the entire system of inter-Americanism needs overhaul. The revised status of Cuba vis-a-vis the OAS will increase the sense of urgency among many Latin Americans to develop a more effective regional vehicle through which to influence US policy toward the rest of the hemisphere.

The conference comes at a time of uneasiness in US - Latin American relations and presents a significant risk of retrogression to the adversary spirit on the part of Latin America toward the US that characterized hemispheric assemblies before the opening of a new dialogue last year. While most of the participants seem determined or at least willing to stick to the issue at hand, a small provocation--whether unintended or planned--might break this discipline. Recent differences between the US and Latin governments over resource policy, the elusiveness of substantive progress to fit the rhetoric of the new dialogue, and publicity over clandestine activities by US agencies in Latin America have together served to renew the old fears and skepticisms about US intentions toward the region. With the problem of the US a more serious matter for examination than the problem of Cuba to the minds of some of the foreign ministers in attendance, the conference has considerable potential for contention.

The OAS and the Sanctions Issue

The OAS is held in low esteem by many, probably most, of its own members because of the plodding,

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over-formalized procedures that hamper so much of its work. Yet many of its humanitarian functions, and particularly the security protection of the Rio Treaty, are valued highly. For example, the small republic of Costa Rica, which supports no army, has more than once invoked treaty protection when its borders were threatened. More lately, the OAS played a modest role in ending hostilities between El Salvador and Honduras. The sanctions against Cuba, imposed in 1964, also were adopted under the rubric of the Rio Treaty.

The growing ineffectiveness of these sanctions, as country after country found the censure of Cuba no longer in its interest, triggered alarm over the wasting integrity of the Rio Treaty. When Colombia and Venezuela (the latter the complainant in the 1964 action against Cuba) appeared on the verge of becoming the eighth and ninth OAS members to have diplomatic connections with Cuba, Costa Rica induced them to delay pending a review of the sanctions issue.

These three countries--Costa Rica, Colombia, and Venezuela--having agreed to co-sponsor the initiative to rescind the 1964 resolutions, carefully picked their way through the minefield of differing views toward Cuba. They contrived a bland resolution that invoked various regional "motherhood" issues such as peace, ideological pluralism, and non-intervention--and emphasized that a vote to rescind merely frees members to associate with Cuba or not, as they choose. Even governments still hostile to the Castro regime have been ill at ease with their obstruction of sister republics that want to open the door to Cuba. This discomfort, along with preoccupation that the Rio Treaty was faced with irreparable damage, created an accommodating atmosphere; in September, all OAS members concurred in the motion that the foreign ministers meet to resolve the Cuba issue. Most expected consensus to reign at Quito as well.

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The effort to handle the sanctions issue as a procedural matter to tidy up both OAS and Rio Treaty irregularities has run into some rough weather. For a few of the countries, the question of Cuban subversion* remains a substantive issue. A larger problem is the current international atmosphere. Inter-American meetings and even bilateral dealings are no longer single, independent events, but are evaluated by many of the governments against a backdrop of shifting alliances, of political affinities outweighed by economic practicalities, and of new opportunities for small or poor countries to wield influence through bloc politics. The narrowest context in which the Quito conference will occur, for most governments, is the new inter-American dialogue.

Counting the Votes

Interpretation and anticipation of the US position at Quito have been painful exercises for most of the countries. The absence of US advocacy or opposition on the sanctions issue and the apparent US disinterest in trying to influence the position of other governments have made the Latins suspect some gamesmanship to which they are not privy. The governments that have followed the US lead on Cuba in the past began to hedge against the possibility that the US might suddenly switch its stand. A long series of events, beginning with the signing of an anti-hijacking agreement in February 1973, has fed Latin fears that the US is dealing with the Castro regime in secret. As the Latinos believe occurred in the case of China, they feel the US intends to restore ties, leaving many countries in the

**The current state of Cuban subversion is discussed in the Interagency Memorandum, "The Status of Cuban Subversion in Latin America," November 1, 1974.*

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position of being more papist than the pope. To allow themselves flexibility, some of these remain officially "undecided" about how they will vote.

Only Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay are clearly opposed to lifting the sanctions. Chile and Uruguay have been particularly determined that the record will not show a clean slate for Cuba. They want a serious analysis of whether Castro has turned away from "exporting revolution" and are presenting their separate cases to plead that he has not. This insistence that Cuba remains a threat, even though it is a position pressed by such a small minority, provides a rationale for the undecided governments to move to the Chile-Uruguay side if they sense it to be the correct political move to make, especially if they believe the US will do so.

Despite Costa Rica's continued assertion that it has fourteen* votes wrapped up, none of the other governments is any longer reading the line-up as certain. Most find the counting difficult past the eleven "sure" affirmatives on lifting sanctions: Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela (the sponsors); Ecuador (the host); Peru, Argentina, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, and Panama (which have diplomatic relations with Havana); and Honduras and El Salvador (which have announced their positions). The sponsors appear fairly confident of winning the votes of Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, and remain hopeful about Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Brazil. Speculation about the US vote has ranged wildly. The growing uncertainty about how the vote will go has created

**Fourteen constitutes a two thirds majority, eight a blocking minority. Two OAS members, Barbados and Jamaica, are not signatories to the Rio Treaty and are non-voting on the resolution on the agenda.*

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two anxieties: the undecideds fear being isolated with a tiny minority, and all are concerned that failure to get the Cuba issue settled will damage not only the Rio Treaty but the entire inter-American system.

In the end, it seems highly probable that the vote will go the way the sponsors intend. The overriding interest will be to establish a near consensus and to free inter-American matters of this nagging issue.

Will Cuba Be the Only Subject?

The risk that the conference will be a blow to inter-Americanism comes less from differences over Cuba than from the renewed fractious attitude among Latins toward the US. After a period of relative harmony, highlighted by meetings between Secretary Kissinger and the foreign ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean early this year, the Latin Americans' doubts about US willingness to play a more positive role in Latin America are again on the rise. Skepticism flowered first over numerous commercial issues--trade restrictions, the sugar quota, and the official US role in problems between Latin governments and private US companies. Some Latins have been impatient also with what they view as a lack of US generosity in ceding points to them on questions of controlling trans-national corporations, the transfer of science and technology, maritime regulations, and a host of problems relating to economic development now under study in OAS working groups, the UN, and other international forums.

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[REDACTED] Recently, the US has been blamed by various groups for the downfall of various governments, for the assassination of Chilean General Prats in Argentina, and for subversion of numerous institutions. President Velasco made a hard hitting speech warning the Peruvians of the ubiquity of provocateurs.

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The Panamanians have laid the groundwork for raising the question of US subversion at the Quito meeting. The government has denied that it will introduce the matter, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Even without a premeditated effort to turn the conference against the US, there is some danger that the Cuba debate might provoke some strong advocate of Castro--the Peruvian foreign minister, perhaps--to counter charges against Cuba with charges against the US. The absence of Secretary Kissinger--which is considered an affront by the Latins--might create a testy atmosphere conducive to this kind of argument.

The temptation to bring the US to public accounting on the subversion issue would not arise from mere caprice. Most of the governments seriously fear undetected intrusions by the powerful US. Some regimes will be vulnerable to strong criticism by "anti-imperialist" groups at home if they let the opportunity to speak out pass them by. For the Third Worlders, particularly, their revolutionary credentials are on the line at home and abroad. Even for moderate governments, the Kissinger absence will be a serious, if temporary, embarrassment. The respected press in Colombia, for example, interprets the second-level

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US delegation as the latest in a series of proofs that Latin America is of no real interest or concern to the US. Colombia's pre-eminent statesman, Alberto Lleras Camargo, also editorialized with a sharp criticism of secret US political activity in the hemisphere. Both themes have been common throughout Latin America.

Each foreign minister will be working from his own set of needs and desires at the conference. Some have ticklish situations at home and might try to gain some particular political victory at Quito with which to refurbish their government's image. For example, the Torrijos regime in Panama is under some fire for conceding too much to the US in the Panama Canal treaty negotiations and may feel obliged to raise Panama's plight at Quito.

Beyond Quito

The Latin Americans' comportment at Quito will reveal to some extent their judgment of what is to be gained or lost in pursuing the new dialogue. Despite their grave reservations, they continue to contribute to various efforts in progress to come to grips with difficult inter-American problems. And the more assertively "independent" countries have become sufficiently confident about their own diplomatic prowess to count more on bilateral exchanges with the US than on multilateral assemblies to press for what they want.

The majority of the countries, though, sense that the increasing unity they have achieved has begun to serve them well in dealing with the US. Their experiences at the UN, where large blocs of small nations working together have been able to shape international policies more and more to their liking, have encouraged them to use similar tactics in regional affairs. The clout that the Arab nations--united--have achieved has further convinced them that a new era has dawned for the underdeveloped nations and that the Latins,

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too, must seize the moment. They have become more willing to bury their own differences to present a united front to the US on regional issues. They probably will therefore make the assessment that to proceed as planned will be their best course. They are scheduled to meet with the US Secretary of State in March to continue constructing a working partnership, and they most likely will see this continuity in their best interests.

Meanwhile, they are seriously considering a separate regional organization without the US. The problem of Cuba's isolation reinforces their thinking along this line. Castro will not join the OAS, which he has consistently maligned and worked to destroy. He probably would be attracted to the sort of regional economic forum proposed by Mexican President Echeverria and endorsed by Venezuela's Perez. Most of the Latin governments actively want to include Cuba in the range of inter-American affairs. Cuba will probably be invited to attend the foreign ministers meeting in March at Buenos Aires and has already indicated it would accept. Only Chile has indicated unwillingness to associate with Cuba at such assemblies.

The OAS itself is in a precarious state. Efforts to restructure it and make it more responsive and responsible have not been very successful, and the sentiment to scrap it in favor of the more free-wheeling, less formal foreign ministers meetings is growing. But some accommodation must be worked out for the far-flung suborganizations now working under OAS direction and budgetary support. The failure of the Quito meeting to lift the sanctions, which all agree are ineffective and unrealistic by now, would probably quicken the mood to dump the OAS. But even a success at Quito might not be enough to save the organization.

In sum, the longer range problems of the hemisphere and the recognition that Latin America cannot

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begin to address many of them without cooperation from the US will probably weigh more heavily with most of the representatives at Quito than either the issue of Cuban subversion or the current disgruntlement over US policies. For this reason, the odds favor a relatively smooth passage of the resolution to lift the sanctions and a consensus to let Quito serve as the meeting that removes an obstacle to full regional communication. While the meeting is more likely than not to follow the agenda, the danger is still real that the subject of subversion will be a highly provocative issue at this particular time.

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